

Shallowford Corridor Planning Study

Prepared for DeKalb County Commissioner Jeff Rader

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In Conjunction with

The North Briarcliff Civic Association, the Dresden East Civic Association and

TABASCO

Transform and Beautify Along the Shallowford Corridor

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Executive Summary

- Vision Statement: *We envision a safe, attractive and economically prosperous village. It expresses our distinctive community identity, celebrates the natural environment, provides local opportunities for work and play, interconnects all ages and cultures, and encourages walking and biking. Our village embraces quality schools, businesses that serve community needs, and a sustainable, green way of life.*
- Based upon the community input collected this summer, the intent of the Neighborhood Center concept appears to track the general direction of the surrounding community. Both the Comp Plan and the surrounding community would like to see a mixed-use and walking community emerge that is less reliant on automobiles. Both envision a community center, and both recognize the importance of green and public spaces.
- According to 2009 Census block group estimates from ARC, there were approximately 20,000 people living within roughly a one-mile radius of the I-85 and Shallowford Interchange. The average density is 10.6 people per acre. Within the four census block groups that surround the interchange, there are approximately 4,700 rental units and approximately 2,600 owner occupied homes. There are approximately 18,000 residents in the four square miles of the city of Decatur.
- There appears to be ample density to support neighborhood oriented shopping and mixed-use development. However, the balkanization of the parcels prevents access to adjoining properties and inhibits mixed-use development, walking and biking. Current zoning and development business practices interfere and prevent the community from achieving its Vision Statement.
- The current zoning categories that can be used in the Shallowford Neighborhood Center will do little to help the community achieve its vision for the neighborhood center. They permit more of the same kinds of development that is currently in place. Significant progress in creating a mixed-use, walking neighborhood cannot be achieved using the current zoning ordinance.
- It is impossible for the County to implement walkable mixed-use communities if it permits property owners to have private streets with gated access. A comparison should be made of the draft DeKalb County zoning ordinance as it relates to multi-family development permitted in Neighborhood Center activity areas. Adjustments should be made if the new zoning allows the continued balkanization of parcels and restricted access of pedestrians and vehicles through the use of private streets.

- The zoning districts for the Neighborhood Center activity centers should require new development to create a grid street pattern to facilitate the development of true neighborhood centers.
- The key issue is when owners seek to make significant changes to their property, will they be required to redevelop under the new zoning districts permitted in the Neighborhood Center land use designation, or will they be permitted to redevelop using their current zoning? If the County wants to implement its land use plan, it must require property owners to redevelop using the new code.
- Another question to be determined in the draft zoning ordinance is what level of redevelopment or reinvestment will trigger the new codes? Simple repairs and even some renovations requiring a permit may not necessarily require the owner to comply with the new ordinance. However, the removal of structures and construction of new buildings should trigger the new ordinance.
- The proposed zoning code could very likely be the key determinant in the future redevelopment within the Shallowford neighborhood center. Residents must closely monitor and influence the completion of this document, in particular the three zoning districts that will apply to neighborhood centers and the rules that determine when owners must comply with these new standards.
- Despite the presence of multi-family housing and MARTA service, there are no sidewalks along the I-85 Access Road. This is a very dangerous safety problem for pedestrians walking from their residences to MARTA stops and to the Publix shopping center. Portions of Plaster Road do not have sidewalks. The sidewalks on Shallowford Road are uncomfortably close to a busy four-lane road. The surrounding single-family neighborhoods were not built with sidewalks. Most of the multi-family developments were built without sidewalks. Those that have sidewalks are limited and intended primarily to help people walk to and from their parked vehicles.
- There are some significant planning challenges which accompany a decision to place a neighborhood center designation close to an interstate interchange. The interchange can no longer just serve the needs of automobiles. If this Neighborhood Center is going to develop as envisioned by DeKalb County the County must advocate for and fund pedestrian safety improvements near this interchange.
- The County must pay close attention to the pedestrian improvements and linkages in all future projects within the Neighborhood Center if it truly wants to foster a walkable community. The County should define “walkable” with a check-list of features and measure each new project against this check-list. Projects that fail to meet the “walkable” requirement should not be permitted in a Neighborhood District.

- The Shallowford interchange is a gateway that should be aesthetically enhanced to better define and distinguish the community. This concept has been initiated by the community, but it needs to be expanded and extended along Shallowford through the development of new streetscapes using tree planting zones to separate sidewalks from travel lanes. Improving the appearance of the bridge with decorative fencing, lighting and planters would make a strong statement. The aesthetic improvements to the interchange and streetscape will better establish a sense of place and help attract investments.
- A goal of the Neighborhood Center concept is to promote alternatives to automobiles. Transit will never be a viable alternative if the pedestrian environment remains hostile and unsafe. There are no bicycle lanes in the study area.
- Funding for sidewalk improvements in DeKalb has always been insufficient to meet the demands; never-the-less residents need to start advocating.
- The 47 bus runs along the Access Roads and provides quick connections to stops near several large office parks: Koger, Century Center and Executive Park. However anyone trying to reach these office parks will need to traverse interchanges on foot. This is an extremely difficult and dangerous activity for pedestrians and probably impossible for someone with limited mobility.
- Access to St. Pius High School is very difficult as a result of turning movement restrictions imposed by Georgia DOT.
- There are a group of apartment complexes along Johnson and Plaster Road that over the long-term may no longer be appropriate sites for apartments. These apartments were built in the 1970's when development was first occurring along the Buford Highway and I-85 corridors. Today these units have deteriorated and rents could reach to more normal levels if reinvestment occurred. It remains to be seen whether these locations will remain viable apartment locations if rents reach metropolitan market levels. Answering this question will determine the availability of financing and the long-term use of the property. The apartments along Plaster Road and Johnson Road have the potential to be redeveloped for townhouses or small lot single-family homes.
- If the County fully enforced the housing code including the interior code requirements, many of the apartments units in this area could not be inhabited. Effective enforcement of existing County ordinances is an essential foundation for motivating redevelopment of deteriorating properties and improving the quality of rental housing for the tenants. Better enforcement of the housing code would demonstrate that community norms are enforced and expected; and could lead to lower crime rates. (See The Broken Window Theory of James Q. Wilson).

- Many immigrants will not contact or are reluctant to contact government authorities. In such circumstances, gangs and illegal activities can flourish. Fair and effective code enforcement can help build trust between the immigrant community and the police department.
- There is a long-term opportunity to create a greenway path along the floodplain that can connect the apartments to the Publix shopping center. Residents interested in this greenway should carefully and cautiously begin to build public support. Other DeKalb neighborhoods have formed stream corridor advocacy groups. Hopefully neighbors in the study area will volunteer to form such a group and learn from other successful organizations.
- As properties are redeveloped in this corridor, the County should begin the process of reserving land for the greenway.
- ARC is focused upon places with a potential regional impact. A place designated a Neighborhood Center doesn't seem to qualify as having regional impact. Despite a "Neighborhood Center" designation, the Shallowford study area is larger in population than many DeKalb municipalities. Given the current diversity of land uses in the Shallowford area, it has an excellent opportunity to redevelop as a mixed-use, walking community.
- Alternatively, an LCI application could be predicated upon a chain of interchanges along I-85 in DeKalb. The interchanges at Chamblee Tucker, Shallowford, Clairmont and North Druid Hills share many similar characteristics and collectively they are significant to the region.
- There are numerous apartment complexes and office parks along the I-85 corridor. Collectively these properties are a significant tax base. To protect its tax base and to spur reinvestment, DeKalb County may find it advantageous to promote a Community Improvement District linking these office parks. A CID would be an excellent funding mechanism to improve pedestrian access near these interchanges and business parks. CIDs have proven to be very effective in improving transportation and stimulating reinvestment.
- DeKalb County should submit an LCI application to ARC this fall.

Section 1: Purpose and Methodology

The DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan originally identified the area around the Shallowford and I-85 Interchange as a Village Center. Upon further consideration with members of the community, the activity center was downgraded to a Neighborhood Center. The designation of the area as an activity center raised questions in the community: What is an activity center? What does this designation mean for future growth in the center? How would this designation affect the surrounding single-family residential area? What potential opportunities and problems will result? What is the vision of the surrounding residents for development in their community?

DeKalb County Commissioner Jeff Rader hired a consultant to help answer these questions and to facilitate several community meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to actively engage and inform the public in a discussion about the neighborhood center and help them develop a planning vision for the activity center. The essential neighborhood organizational work had been previously performed by the Dresden East Civic Association and the North Briarcliff Civic Association. In 2006 citizens from the two organizations formed a new unit called Transform and Beautify Along the Shallowford Corridor, called TABASCO for short. This organization was formed to deal with crime, nuisances and zoning changes along the Shallowford Corridor in hopes of improving the character of the commercial district that linked the two neighborhoods.

For the planning effort initiated by Commissioner Rader, TABASCO organized a series of community meetings that were held at St. Pius High School. In between the community meetings, smaller committees refined the direction of the larger community. At subsequent community meetings, the refined work products were reviewed and approved by the larger community. Ultimately the work product from the community meetings was sent to the two sponsoring civic associations for their adoption, to Commissioner Rader's office, and to the DeKalb County Planning and Development Department.

At the first community meeting May 22, 2010, specific members of the community were asked to describe examples of the actions taken by community leaders in their neighborhood which resulted in positive changes for the community. Next, the community was presented with a description of the regional context in which development has occurred in metro Atlanta. Sydney Douse of the DeKalb Planning Department then explained the planning concepts of activity centers and the purpose of the Neighborhood Center. The community participants were asked to work in small groups to define the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Finally the participants were asked to return to small groups and draft a Vision

Statement for their community. In each of these exercises there was active questioning, participation and dialogue from the community attendees. Following this meeting a sub committee met and refined the Vision Statement.

At a June 19th community meeting the community refined the SWOT and adopted the draft Vision Statement. They were then presented with a slide presentation of examples of development in DeKalb County and the city of Atlanta. Most of the images were of new development, but there were a few examples of higher density apartments built before World War II and the advent of the automobile. Images of developments in Brookhaven, on Buford Highway, near Northlake, Oak Grove, Chamblee, Midtown and Glenwood Park were presented as well as some examples of development in the Shallowford corridor. Having seen examples of recent development, the participants confirmed their Vision Statement as appropriate. Finally they were presented with some planning concepts that showed how portions of the Neighborhood center could be organized in the future. These concepts are presented in the appendix. They depicted methods to build a grid street pattern in a portion of the neighborhood; walking distances; possible street configurations with sidewalks, tree planting zones and bicycle lanes; and natural features.

At the June 29th meeting the participants reviewed the previous work and were asked to explain how several key performance areas – transportation, redevelopment and public services would function if their Vision Statement was implemented. This exercise was intended to be the basis for writing community goals. The consultant later used the work and words of the participants to draft goals. These goals were subsequently presented to the TABASCO organizers and the parent civic associations.

This report summarizes the process and work completed by the community during the summer of 2010 in the TABASCO meetings. Section 2 presents the regional context in which land use decisions have been made and some of the planning assumptions that must be considered. Sections 3, 4, and 5 present the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; Community Vision Statement; and the Preliminary Community Goals that the community prepared and approved this summer at the community meetings. In the process of facilitating the community meeting, the consultant has examined planning challenges in this community. In Section 6, this report reconciles the new Neighborhood Center land use designation and the stated desires of the surrounding community. Section 7 summarizes the key findings of the consultant and they are the basis for the recommendations in Section 8. The purpose of the recommendations are to help the community achieve its stated vision; and to help the community and the County achieve their mutual goal of revitalizing and redeveloping the area around the Shallowford interchange into a walkable Village Center with mixed-uses.

Section 2: Regional Context

The most significant milestone in the modern history of the Shallowford corridor is the construction of the I-85 interchange and its subsequent widening. I-85 is a major commuter and trucking route in the region. When the access roads and the interchanges opened at Shallowford, Chamblee-Tucker and Clairmont roads, new real estate and development markets were created for apartments, office parks and distribution centers. As the residential growth increased retail stores also began to open. Since the construction of I-85 a number of other major trends have emerged that provide context to current and future development patterns in the Shallowford corridor. These regional trends were considered by the community prior to determining their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats:

- Sprawling regional growth
- Back to the city movement
- Decentralization of jobs
- Increased traffic congestion
- Air quality marginally meeting minimum federal standards
- Potential water shortages
- Aging population
- Ethnic diversity in the suburbs
- Storm water flooding

In addition there are several current questions that will determine future growth patterns. The unknowns for future growth include:

- What is the long-term impact of the economic recession on real estate values in this community as compared to the region?
- When the economy recovers, will sprawl resume, or will redevelopment occur in infill areas by capturing more capital investment than green field sites in outlying areas?
- Will the demand for transit service increase?
- What are the impacts of reduced state and local government revenues on the quality and quantity of local government services?

Section 3: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Approximately 75 residents participated in first community meeting at St Pius High School. During one section of the meeting, participants were asked to examine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities in their community. The following summarizes their findings and captures the “voice” of the participants by using their language when possible.

Strengths:

- Proximity to strong employment centers in Downtown, Midtown, Buckhead, Perimeter Center and along the I-85 corridor in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. Both bus and train service from MARTA.
- The quality of local schools: St Pius, Lakeside, Hawthorne and Sophia Academy.
- Stable, affordable and well maintained neighborhoods in a comfortable suburban setting with mature tree canopies and friendly neighbors who actively participate in various civic organizations.
- Relatively low incidence of crime, particularly in the neighborhoods east of I-85. A good relationship with the police department through Interactive Community Policing.
- Convenient neighborhood shopping at the Publix shopping center.
- A successful and demonstrated commitment to improving the landscaping, appearance and pedestrian safety of the Shallowford interchange.
- Parks and greenspace

Weaknesses:

- Portions of the Shallowford neighborhood contain substandard apartment complexes and portions of Shallowford Road corridor have extended-stay motels, poorly maintained duplexes and day labor pools.
- The fear of crime is greater on the western side of I-85. The extended stay motels may be a source of crime.
- Noise from the freeway and PDK airport.
- The area is not pedestrian or bicycle friendly and is dependent upon automobiles even for short trips. Bus service is inadequate.
- I-85 serves as a boundary for some County service providers and for political districts. This splinters the community’s voice and the delivery of essential government services.
- Flooding along the North Fork of Peachtree Creek and the expansion of the floodplain.

- Cultural and communication differences prevent traditional community norms from being informally enforced.
- Dresden Park is frequently used for pick-up soccer games. These games often interfere with others trying to use the park for other purposes. Better recreational programming is needed to balance the use of the park among a wider group of residences. Some residents also expressed safety concerns in the park.
- While the quality of the County library is very good, parents do not feel safe allowing their children to walk or bike to the facility.
- There is no central gathering point for the community.
- Dresden Elementary has made improvements in serving the needs of the student attendees; however the school does not attract many students from the surrounding single-family neighborhoods.
- Near the interchange, traffic flows, turning movements and access are solely determined by GDOT. Access to St. Pius High School and Johnson road is difficult.
- Inadequate code enforcement regarding housing on Shallowford Road, zoning and environment ordinances. Personal property is often left at the curb. Cars are parked in front yards. Paints and other pollutants are dumped into streams. Code enforcement response is not immediate and often takes 30 days before an officer is sent to a complaint.
- There is not a wide variety of retail stores and restaurants. Some of the retail does not serve the larger surrounding community.
- Younger members of the community are not as involved in civic efforts as long-term residents.

Opportunities:

- Developing a unified vision among all stakeholders (civic associations, commercial property owners and residents) within and outside the neighborhood center that will lead to a community driven plan for the neighborhood center.
- The possible redevelopment of standalone retail properties, aging apartments and motels in the neighborhood center area into a pedestrian, bicycle friendly mixed-use area that meets the neighborhood retail needs and provides multi-generational housing.
- The neighborhood center concept could provide a community identity and serve as a gateway to the surrounding single-family neighborhoods. It could help recruit and attract desirable businesses.
- Better utilization of the HOV lane connection to Downtown and Midtown could strengthen the neighborhood center concept and improve access to major employment centers. Express bus connections to MARTA rail stations and Northlake would reduce auto dependency and support a pedestrian oriented development.
- The diversity of the community offers growth opportunities for residents and business.

- Developing a greenway along the creek path that provides a non-motorized travel path, reduces the impact of flooding and provides additional public open space in a natural setting will improve the quality of life and improve the environment.
- The easements for the electric transmission lines could be used for a connecting path, bikeway, dog run or community garden if adjoining property owners and Georgia Power could agree to additional uses.
- Continued conversion of apartments into condominiums could increase the number of long-term residents who will be committed to social and economic health of the neighborhoods.
- A tree planting program will improve the appearance of the Shallowford corridor, reduce erosion in the floodplain and could encourage homeowners to replace and replant trees.
- Pedestrian safety, public health and the overall retail market can be improved by adding sidewalks along routes that connect residential areas to commercial areas.
- Increasing the quality and amount of useful greenspace and active recreation space at Mary Scott Nature Preserve and Dresden Park.
- Installing sound barriers along the I-85 corridor could reduce noise from freeway traffic.

Threats:

- Continued development without a plan or unified vision among commercial property owners and surrounding residents.
- The inability to involve and engage more people in the community planning process.
- The current land use controls which have permitted the existing development.
- The current enforcement levels and response time of code enforcement.
- Undesirable utility infrastructure such as cell towers, substations and duct banks.
- Degradations of the streams through unlawful dumping and stormwater runoff causing erosion and scouring.
- Potential expansion of PDK

Section 4: Vision Statement

At the first community meeting with 75 people in attendance, participants participated in a number of exercises that helped to demonstrate a shared sense of community. Near the end of the session they were divided into groups and asked to write a vision statement expressing their values and describing how their community would appear and function in the future. The groups were asked to present and explain their vision statements. From these draft statements, a smaller group of participants agreed to convene and write a composite vision statement at a subsequent meeting. At the next community meeting the composite statement was read and discussed and slightly modified before it was adopted by those present:

We envision a safe, attractive and economically prosperous village. It expresses our distinctive community identity, celebrates the natural environment, provides local opportunities for work and play, interconnects all ages and cultures, and encourages walking and biking. Our village embraces quality schools, businesses that serve community needs, and a sustainable, green way of life.

Section 5: Preliminary Goals

At the third community meeting participants were asked to consider how their community would function in the future if their Vision Statement was implemented. Specifically they were asked if the Vision Statement was realized, how the use of land would be different; how would the transportation system function and how would public services be delivered. These questions formed the basis for developing a set of preliminary community goals. Using the descriptors created and presented by the community, the facilitator converted them into written goals and subsequently presented these goals to a smaller community steering committee. The goals were subsequently reviewed by the two affected civic associations.

Public Services Goals

1. Code enforcement should be strengthened through an improved partnership between the citizens and DeKalb County government.
 - a. Civic associations and the County will continue to provide web access to relevant zoning and housing ordinances to help citizens understand the standards in the code.
 - b. Civic associations will continue to assist residents to contact appropriate County staff who are responsible for enforcing the housing and zoning codes.
 - c. Citizens will maintain a journal of their code enforcement conversations.
2. A public library and a recreation center are requested by the community. This library could be in a “storefront” setting and leased to the County. A recreation center located near one of two existing public parks would be ideal.
3. A greater police presence is needed in the public parks to ensure public safety.

Transportation Goals

1. Develop a more balanced transportation network that reduces the community’s reliance upon automobiles and enables walking, biking and transit as viable modes of transportation for residents within the study area.
 - a. Conduct a transportation study that identifies current traffic patterns, circulation problems and traffic generators in the study area
 - b. Recommend an improved configuration of the street network to reduce congestion.
 - c. Implement a complete street system of travel lanes, bicycle lanes, street trees and sidewalks on appropriate streets to calm traffic and offer alternative modes.
 - d. Improve the interconnectivity of commercial and multi-family parcels by using new local streets that distribute traffic and create opportunities for walking and biking.
 - e. Improve the walking and biking connections from the surrounding communities to existing commercial sites and to potential mixed use sites in the study area.
 - f. Develop a transportation system and sidewalk network conducive to the needs of seniors.

2. Improve transit connections to MARTA stations and employment centers.
 - a. Develop a shuttle/circulator to the Chamblee or Doraville MARTA station from a central location in the study. This will improve transit connections to Buckhead, Perimeter Center, Midtown and Downtown.
 - b. Create an express bus service to Downtown and Midtown from a central location in the study area.
 - c. Ensure good connectivity to this central transit stop without encouraging commuters from outside the community to park and ride into the study area.
3. Encourage shared parking to reduce the overall amount of parking, improve the investment in parking spaces and to encourage walking.
4. Conduct a study to examine the options and feasibility of developing environmentally sensitive greenway paths for passive recreation, walking and non-motorized transportation.
5. Reexamine the design of the Shallowford interchange to improve traffic congestion, improve access to St. Pius High School and enhance the comfort and safety of pedestrians and cyclists. As a part of this design, develop and implement an enhanced landscaping plan for the Shallowford Bridge and Interchange.
6. The connectivity between parks and schools should be improved for pedestrians and cyclists

Land Use and Zoning Goals

1. Encourage the creation of mixed-use development along Shallowford Road and at other appropriate locations within the study. If express bus service is established, transit oriented development should occur near these transit stops.
 - a. Encourage the development of ground floor retail or office with residential units on the upper levels.
 - b. Encourage and promote housing for seniors that enable residents to continue to live in their community. Encourage a mix of retail and services that support seniors.
 - c. Establish “build-to” lines along streets in order to create better organized and more attractive streets. Provide parking behind buildings in landscaped lots and decks.
 - d. Limit building heights to 4 stories or less. Require future utilities to be installed underground. Establish design criteria for fences and signs and prohibit billboards.
 - e. Discourage office and retail uses that attract commuters from outside the study area and the surrounding communities.
 - f. Maintain low density single family development in the areas surrounding the activity center and provide appropriately scaled development near the single-family homes.

2. Create and connect a network of green spaces using the stream bank corridors, existing parks, school playgrounds, transmission line easements, bike paths and pedestrian paths.
 - a. Improve the ecological function of the stream banks by respecting the stream bank setbacks, removing invasive species, planting appropriate vegetation and trees to maintain the stream corridor and monitor the streams for illegal dumping.
 - b. Develop and implement a tree canopy plan that covers street trees, stream banks, parking lots and open space.
 - c. Inform stream bank property owners' understanding of the value of the stream banks and their proper care.
 - d. Require or induce redeveloped properties to provide greenway paths, easements, green space or open space that can be accessed by the public and adjoining properties to create the network and connect the green spaces.
 - e. Encourage the development of businesses that will provide community gathering places, but with restricted hours of liquor sales. Future open space and public spaces will be designed in such a way that community norms regarding alcohol can be self-enforced by the surrounding property owners and citizens.

The goals should be considered preliminary because further and more comprehensive planning studies must be conducted to determine their feasibility and validity. Moreover, to a large extent the business community did not participate in this community dialogue despite several attempts from the facilitator, the community and Commissioners Rader's office to engage them. A more formal and detailed comprehensive planning study will uncover more information and will hopefully stimulate more interest from the commercial property owners. These Preliminary Goals which follow are intended to provide direction to future studies. There is general agreement about them from the surrounding single-family residential areas.

Section 6: The Neighborhood Center, Future Land Use and Zoning

This section of the report will examine the interaction and relationships between the neighborhood center designation of the comprehensive plan, the proposed zoning code and the community's Vision Statement.

Neighborhood Center

The current DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan uses the term “character area” to define the visual and functional differences of communities, corridors and natural areas within DeKalb County. Within each character area, specific policies can be applied to help them perform better in the future. The area around the Shallowford and I-85 interchange was designated a “Neighborhood Center” character area. A map of this specific neighborhood center is shown in the appendix. The comprehensive plan provides the following definition of a neighborhood center:

“A neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space.”

The county plan further states:

“The intent of the Neighborhood Center Character Area is to identify areas that can serve the local neighborhood’s needs for goods and services. These areas should complement the character of neighborhoods and the location of the commercial areas should reduce automobile travel, promote walkability and increased transit usage. These areas consist of a neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as general retail, neighborhood commercial, professional office, higher density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses that are easily accessible by pedestrians. The proposed density for areas of this type is up to 24 dwelling units per acre.”

The primary land uses expected in a Neighborhood Center are:

- Townhouses
- Condominiums
- Apartments
- Retail and Commercial
- Office
- Parks and Recreational Facilities
- Public and Civic Facilities
- Institutional Uses

Current Zoning

Under the current zoning ordinance, the following zoning classifications are permitted in the Neighborhood Center:

- RM-100
- RM-85
- RM-75
- Pedestrian Community District
- Neighborhood Shopping
- C-1 (Commercial)
- Office and Institutional
- Office Institutional Transition
- Pedestrian Center District
- Office Commercial Residential

Many of the properties within the Shallowford Neighborhood Center are currently zoned using one of the above districts. Two properties in the Shallowford Neighborhood Center are zoned RM-HD which permits up to 30 units per acre. This zoning category is no longer permitted in a Neighborhood Center. Therefore no other property will be rezoned to this category. The properties that currently have the RM-HD zoning may continue to operate and use their property under this category.

The current zoning categories that can be used in the Shallowford Neighborhood Center will do little to help the community achieve its vision for the neighborhood center. They permit more of the same kinds of development that is currently in place. Significant progress in creating a mixed-use, walking neighborhood cannot be achieved using the current zoning ordinance.

Proposed Zoning

DeKalb County is in the process of adopting a new zoning code that will reflect the direction and policy objectives of the current comprehensive plan. At the writing of this document, the Planning and Economic Development Committee of the County Commission is carefully reviewing the draft zoning ordinance. It is unclear when the new zoning ordinance will be complete and ready for adoption. Final adoption appears to be months away.

There are three new *proposed* zoning categories that will be applicable to the Neighborhood Center land use designation. Many of the details of these proposed districts have yet to be completed. It will be important for residents and businesses near the Shallowford Neighborhood Center to monitor the modifications and changes in these two proposed districts. The draft documents can be found at:

http://web.co.dekalb.ga.us/planning/synthDocs/ArticleDrafts/Article2_09.1.09.pdf

The NC-Res (Neighborhood Center Residential Mix) and the NC-Mx (Neighborhood Center Mixed Use District) are similar. The both permit single-family home on small lots, townhouses and multi-family housing. The maximum density is 24 dwelling units per acre. They both permit a wide variety of retail office and residential uses, but in the NC-Res district the non-residential uses must be accessory uses to the primary residential use. In general the goals of the districts are to permit comprehensively planned, pedestrian oriented and human scaled communities. These proposed regulations are intended to promote walking and alternative transportation. Building heights would be limited to four stories. Retail stores would be limited to 15,000 SF in the NC-Mx district, which precludes large big-box retailers and most chain grocery stores. Office and retail can be built on the ground floor with residential above. Drive-thru restaurants are forbidden along with a wide variety of automobile related businesses that are incompatible with pedestrian oriented neighborhoods. Hotels and motels are not permitted in either district. Twenty percent of property developed under these regulations must be set aside for open space. Transitional height planes and buffers are required against adjoining single-family zoned properties.

The third proposed zoning district that could affect the Shallowford Neighborhood Center is the R-MX (Residential Small Lot Mixed) District. This proposed district is more residentially oriented and will permit single-family lots that are 50 feet wide and as small as 6,000 SF, townhouse lots, duplexes and small multi-family structures. This district is essentially intended to encourage redevelopment of non-single-family properties. The higher density will provide some economic incentive to owners who have previously developed commercial or multi-family housing. Small lots will add density needed to support neighborhood oriented retail uses and create walking oriented communities that can make transit more feasible. Household size in Atlanta and the U.S. is declining. Increasingly there are more one and two-person households, often without children. Smaller lot developments can meet the needs of this growing demographic trend. The small residential lots and the open space requirements offer an opportunity to add trees in areas that previously have been mass graded and developed. The regulations require 20% open space, which essentially means that for every 10 lots of development, two of the lots must be reserved for a park, a public square or green.

In the future property owners in the Shallowford neighborhood center will be able to redevelop under the new zoning codes for the Neighborhood Center. These new zoning districts help implement the land use section of the comprehensive plan. However, it is important to note that properties currently zoned under the current zoning code may continue to operate using the current zoning designation. The new land use plan and the new zoning districts specifically designed for the Neighborhood Center do not automatically change the current zoning. After the County finishes the proposed ordinance and adopts it, the new zoning districts will become effective when a property owner in the Neighborhood Center redevelops their property. In

other words, as properties are demolished and rebuilt they will be required to comply with the regulations of one of the three new zoning districts permitted in the Neighborhood Center land use designation.

It is not certain what will happen to the current zoning code classifications once the new ordinance is adopted. Properties currently zoned using the old zoning classifications will be able to continue to use their property for the uses permitted in the old districts. The key issue is when owners seek to make significant changes to their property, will they be required to redevelop under the new zoning districts permitted in the Neighborhood Center land use designation, or will they be permitted to redevelop using their current zoning? If the County wants to implement its land use plan, it must require property owners to redevelop using the new code. However, if there are significant distinctions between the new and old code, property owners will object to a policy that forces them to use a new code when they redevelop. Another question to be answered is what level of redevelopment or reinvestment will trigger the new codes? Simple repairs and even some renovations requiring a permit may not necessarily require the owner to comply with the new ordinance. However, the removal of structures and construction of new buildings will likely trigger the new ordinance.

Based upon the community input collected this summer, the intent of the Neighborhood Center concept appears to track the general direction of the surrounding community. At the Transform and Beautify Along the Shallowford Corridor meetings this summer, the community expressed a desire to see the area redevelop as a pedestrian oriented mixed-use center. The Vision Statement adopted by the community and the intent of the Neighborhood Center concept in the DeKalb Comprehensive Plan are compatible:

We envision a safe, attractive and economically prosperous village. It expresses our distinctive community identity, celebrates the natural environment, provides local opportunities for work and play, interconnects all ages and cultures, and encourages walking and biking. Our village embraces quality schools, businesses that serve community needs, and a sustainable, green way of life.

The DeKalb Comprehensive Plan states that the intent of the Neighborhood Center concept is:

To identify areas that can serve the local neighborhood's needs for goods and services. These areas should complement the character of neighborhoods and the location of the commercial areas should reduce automobile travel, promote walkability and increased transit usage. These areas consist of a neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as general retail, neighborhood commercial, professional office, higher density housing, and appropriate public and open space uses that are easily accessible by pedestrians. The proposed density for areas of this type is up to 24 dwelling units per acre

Moving forward, the challenge is to better align the specific goals and vision of the community with the opportunities afforded in the Comprehensive Plan - specifically fine tuning the applicable zoning categories to meet the community's desires. Both the Comp Plan and the surrounding community would like to see a mixed-use and walking community emerge that is less reliant on automobiles. Both envision a community center, and both recognize the importance of green and public spaces.

The Comprehensive Plan defines the maximum permitted residential density as 24 dwelling units per acre. The ability to develop this maximum may depend upon a number of factors. The new zoning code will determine these factors. The TABASCO meetings did not significantly examine the issue of density. Many of the surrounding residents are leery of the densities currently permitted in the multi-family complexes. A primary concern about residential densities is traffic congestion. However, many in the community also recognize that density creates the opportunity for local jobs, better transit service and a broader mix of shopping opportunities – all of which can result in fewer and shorter automobile trips. Future planning exercises should explore with the community the causes of traffic congestion and trip generation.

While the intent of the Neighborhood center land use designation seems to generally align with the communities Vision Statement, it may be possible to create a more detailed comprehensive plan and a zoning overlay tailored for the Shallowford Neighborhood Center. This opportunity will be further discussed in the *Recommendations* section of this report. DeKalb County does not have the resources to organize and prepare such a detailed sub-area plan or zoning district for the Shallowford Neighborhood Center at this time. Funding would have to come from an outside source, such as the Livable Center Initiative program of the Atlanta Regional Commission, or another source. DeKalb County would have to be a willing and cooperative partner to create a specific plan. Most importantly property owners and nearby residents would have to be supportive and engaged to develop an effective plan.

Section 7: Analysis and Findings

This section presents the conclusions of the consultant. It is based upon his meetings with the community, observations of development, research and professional opinion.

Sense of Community

- The landscaping near the interchange is a significant demonstration by the surrounding community. It is a visual statement that people in the area care about their community. It is a positive commitment to community that can inspire others participate in civic purposes. It also attracts the attention of outsiders and potential investors.
- The Publix grocery store; the Chocolate coffee shop; the community sponsored landscaping around the I-85 interchange; the Neighborhood Center designation in the Comprehensive Plan and the TABASCO community meetings are the basic foundations for building a community in the study area.
- The interchange is a gateway into the surrounding residential neighborhoods. It provides residents a sense of arrival and departure from their neighborhood.
- There is widespread recognition by the surrounding homeowners that the development and redevelopment within the Neighborhood Center has an impact on the community just outside the boundaries of the Neighborhood Center. The surrounding community wants to see successful redevelopment within the Neighborhood Center, and they would like to see this Neighborhood Center become a focal point and gathering place for the community.
- St. Pius built in 1958 is a stabilizing force in the community, but its growth and sports activities create occasional conflicts with adjoining residential properties. There is a tendency in the community to perceive St. Pius as having unlimited financial resources.
- While there is some tension between the single-family homeowners in the surrounding communities and the businesses that cater to the immigrant community, there is general acceptance, tolerance and appreciation for the diversity in the community by the single-family homeowners. The most contentious issue between nearby homeowners and the local businesses are the day laborers congregating at the convenience stores. There is also hostility towards the management and operation of the Shallowford Inn. There are charges of drug sales and prostitution in and around the property.
- According to 2009 Census block group estimates from ARC, there were approximately 20,000 people living within roughly a one-mile radius of the I-85 and Shallowford Interchange. In this one mile radius the average density is 10.6 people per acre. A one-mile radius extends beyond the neighborhood center boundaries and includes some single-family home neighborhoods. Within the four census block groups that surround the interchange, there are approximately 4,700 rental units and approximately 2,600 owner occupied homes.

Interconnectivity, Walking and Transit

- There appears to be ample density to support neighborhood oriented shopping and mixed-use development. However, the balkanization of the parcels prevents access to adjoining properties and inhibits mixed-use development, walking and biking. Current zoning and development business practices interfere and prevent the community from achieving its Vision Statement.
- As a consequence of the lack of connectivity, there is very little economic synergy between commercial properties and adjacent multi-family properties. The newly redeveloped apartment properties are gated fortresses. The Publix shopping center has a gated entrance for vehicles and pedestrians to the adjoining Amli apartments; however this gateway is inconveniently located for apartment residents. Moreover, the apartment complex sidewalks do not lead to the gates. Neither the shopping center, nor the apartments were designed to foster inter-parcel connectivity. The gate between the properties seems to have been an after-thought rather than a design feature
- The best synergy between apartments and retail development occurs along Johnson Road and along Shallowford west of I-85. These convenience stores, laundromats and fast food restaurants cater to Hispanic residents of the adjacent and nearby apartments.
- Despite the presence of multi-family housing and MARTA service, there are no sidewalks along the I-85 Access Road. The northbound Access Road is heavily used by pedestrians. This is a very dangerous safety problem for pedestrians walking from their residences to MARTA stops and to the Publix shopping center.
- Portions of Plaster Road do not have sidewalks. The sidewalks on Shallowford Road are uncomfortably close to a busy four-lane road.
- The surrounding single-family neighborhoods were not built with sidewalks.
- Most of the multi-family developments were built without sidewalks. Those that have sidewalks are limited and intended primarily to help people walk to and from their parked vehicles.
- A goal of the Neighborhood Center concept is to promote alternatives to automobiles. Transit will never be a viable alternative if the pedestrian environment remains hostile and unsafe. There are no bicycle lanes in the study area.
- MARTA bus service from the neighborhood Center is infrequent, but the travel times are relatively short. The 33 bus route provides a good connection to the MARTA rail system. It can reach the Chamblee station in 13 minutes from a bus stop at I-85 and Shallowford. However there is only one bus per hour during peak commuting hours.
- The 47 bus runs along the Access Roads and provides quick connections to stops near several large office parks: Koger, Century Center and Executive Park. However anyone trying to reach these office parks will need to traverse interchanges on foot. This is an extremely difficult and dangerous activity for pedestrians and probably impossible for someone using a wheelchair. Accessing Century Center from the Access Road bus would require a pedestrian to walk underneath the elevated freeway at the Clairmont Interchange – a particularly uninviting walk.

Development within the Neighborhood Center

- The original commercial businesses at the interchange were interstate-travel related: gas stations, fast food and motels. These properties have been harmed by subsequent DOT right-of-way encroachment making some properties difficult to access. The interstate motel business has evolved, and is no longer viable at this location. The two motels in the area are more oriented to daily and weekly rentals. Gas stations have moved away from immediate adjacency to the interstate.
- The second round of development in the area reflected the role of interstates in fostering suburban development. Apartments, office and distribution uses were built primarily along the access roads. Retail development occurred along Shallowford Road. The access roads provided valuable road frontage that previously did not exist. Residential and commercial tenants enjoy quick access to the freeway network.
- The Publix shopping center has been a successful project and will remain as currently configured for the foreseeable future.
- Access to St. Pius High School is very difficult as a result of turning movement restrictions imposed by Georgia DOT.

Apartments

- During the housing boom of 2000-2007, three of the older apartment complexes were converted to condominiums. For the foreseeable future, apartment conversions to condominiums are unlikely.
- Two apartment complexes were demolished and rebuilt and a new complex was built at the site of the former IRS center. Occupancies are high within the three newest apartment complexes. One apartment complex directly across Shallowford Road from the Publix is currently undergoing a significant remodeling. All of the locations where redevelopment and reinvestment have occurred are at sites with superior visibility for marketing apartments.
- The Wynscape Apartments dominates the northwest quadrant of the interchange. These units are deteriorating rapidly. The property requires significant reinvestment and represents an important upgrade opportunity. The best opportunity for mixed-use redevelopment to occur in this quadrant will be at the site of the Wynscape. However, because the Wynscape has good visibility from I-85 and Shallowford Road, there is a strong possibility it will remain an apartment.
- There are a group of apartment complexes along Johnson and Plaster Road that over the long-term may no longer remain viable sites for apartments. These apartments were built in the 1970's when development was first occurring along the Buford Highway and I-85 corridors. Today these units have deteriorated. They are marketed as low cost housing and they target Hispanic residents. According to property managers familiar with this sub-market, actions taken by the Gwinnett County Sheriff to enforce federal immigration laws have pushed a portion of the Hispanic community to seek available housing in DeKalb County. As a result, the apartments near the Shallowford and Chamblee Tucker interchanges have relatively high occupancies for their conditions. This increase in demand may provide sufficient cash flow for the apartment owners to

continue to operate these apartments. However over time these buildings will require major renovations and reinvestment. To recoup these costs, the owners will probably be required to increase rents. It remains to be seen whether these locations will remain viable apartment locations if rents reach metropolitan market levels for new apartments. Answering this question will determine the availability of financing and the long-term use of the property. The apartments along Plaster Road and Johnson Road have the potential to be redeveloped for townhouses or small lot single-family homes.

- If the apartments along Plaster and Johnson roads are redeveloped, it will change the market dynamics for retail businesses in the immediate vicinity.
- Some of the older apartment complexes along the northbound Access Road were built in steep terrain and/or within the floodplain. The floodplain has undoubtedly widened as development upstream and subsequent storm water runoff has increased. The buildings in the floodplain will be a drag on redevelopment since owners will be reluctant to demolish structures in places where they cannot be reconstructed. The steep terrain has required recently redeveloped properties to construct large, expensive retaining walls.

Public Facilities and Open Space

- The North Branch of the Peachtree Creek is the most significant natural feature in the area. Two ponds were created in the 1970's to serve as focal points for single-family neighborhoods. In general, the creek is treated in a manner similar to most urban streams in metro Atlanta: it is the repository for storm water, the right of way for sanitary sewer lines and otherwise ignored. Some adjoining properties flood during periods of heavy rains. No local group has emerged to monitor stream conditions and promote restoration of the ecosystem.
- Dresden Park was renovated with County Greenspace Bonds, but there was little programming for the park. A Hispanic soccer league assumes control of the park for their scheduled matches. The area used for soccer games is worn out. Other residents feel their use of the park has been usurped.
- St. Pius acquired property for a new baseball field and seating for spectators after the school and County had previously failed to reach an agreement permitting the school to use and maintain a portion of Dresden Park for baseball. The school installed a foot bridge to cross a creek separating its campus from the park in anticipation of accessing Dresden Park for baseball. The economic recession is making it difficult for St. Pius to complete the baseball facility on their newly acquire land. The footbridge has been fenced off and closed.
- A Georgia Power easement for an electric transmission line, the St. Pius footbridge and a creek running near Dresden Park have been used as path by apartment residents along Plaster Road to reach Shallowford Road. The use of this path and easement became a problem when residents on Frontier Trail experienced thefts from their properties. The bridge previously installed by St. Pius was closed and locked to prevent this path from functioning.

Section 8: Recommendations

The final section offers policy recommendations to help DeKalb County reach the goals in the County Comprehensive Plan and to help the community obtain its stated vision.

The Shallowford Interchange

The Shallowford Interchange serves as a gateway to the surrounding communities and businesses. This gateway should be aesthetically enhanced to better define and distinguish the community. This concept has been initiated by the community, but it needs to be expanded and extended along Shallowford through the development of new streetscapes using tree planting zones to separate sidewalks from travel lanes. Improving the appearance of the bridge with decorative fencing, lighting and planters would make a strong statement. The area may also benefit from a landscaped median in Shallowford Road. The best method to fund streetscape improvement is through a Livable Center Initiative grant from the Atlanta Regional Commission. The aesthetic improvements to the interchange and streetscape will distinguish the community, better establish a sense of place and help attract investments.

There are some significant planning challenges which accompany a decision to place a neighborhood center designation near an interstate interchange. Drivers leaving a limited access highway designed for speeds above 55 mph will be challenged to immediately alter their driving behavior at the top of a freeway ramp where they enter a neighborhood center. The interchanges along I-85 were nominally designed for pedestrians. Multiple turning movements make interchanges extremely difficult for pedestrians to cross. Pedestrian safety is further compromised by yield signs, right-on-red turns and double turning lanes. The environment for pedestrians and cyclists near most interchanges is somewhere between non-existent and hostile. Placing a Neighborhood center at the or near the interchange requires the County and State to re-examine how the interchange functions. Under the neighborhood center designation, the interchange can no longer just serve the needs of automobiles. If this Neighborhood Center is going to develop as envisioned by DeKalb County and by the surrounding community as a mixed-use, walking neighborhood, the area around the interchange must be safe for pedestrians. The County must advocate for and fund pedestrian safety improvements near this interchange. Already there are a significant number of pedestrians crossing the interchange including students from St. Pius High School. DeKalb County, Georgia DOT, St. Pius, the community and the nearby businesses should all participate in the design and implementation of streetscape and pedestrian safety plans. In the process of re-examining how the interchange serves a Neighborhood Center designation, vehicular access to St. Pius needs to be reconsidered and improved. It is confusing and difficult.

Community Improvement District

There are numerous apartment complexes and office parks (Executive Park, Century Center, the Koger Center, Mercer, DeKalb Technology, Phoenix, Presidential, Northlake) along the I-85 corridor. Collectively these office properties are a significant tax base in DeKalb County. To protect its tax base and to spur reinvestment, DeKalb County may find it advantageous to promote a Community Improvement District linking these office parks. A CID would be an excellent funding mechanism to improve pedestrian access near each of these interchanges and business parks. In other locations, CIDs have proven to be very effective in improving transportation and stimulating reinvestment.

Walking in a Neighborhood Center

In addition to improving the pedestrian environment immediately around the interchange, the County should take other steps to create a better pedestrian environment in all future developments within the Neighborhood Center. The County Comprehensive Plan states that the Neighborhood Center “should complement the character of neighborhoods and the location of the commercial areas should reduce automobile travel, promote walkability and increased transit usage.” It is impossible for the County to implement walkable mixed-use communities if it permits property owners to have private streets with gated access.

A comparison should be made of the draft County zoning ordinance as it relates to multi-family development permitted in Neighborhood Center activity areas. Adjustments should be made if the new zoning allows the continued balkanization of parcels and restricted access of pedestrians and vehicles through the use of private streets. In recent years, most suburban apartment communities in DeKalb County are built with private interior streets. This permits the owners the ability to gate their streets and sidewalks. Ironically none of the surrounding single-family neighborhoods are gated. Streets in most apartment complexes exist to connect parking spaces to the front gate; they do not provide inter-parcel connectivity. The County should review its proposed zoning districts for the Neighborhood Center District and eliminate the opportunities to gate streets. Furthermore the zoning districts for the Neighborhood Center activity centers should require new development to create a grid street pattern to facilitate the development of true neighborhood centers.

The County must pay close attention to the pedestrian improvements and linkages in all future projects within the Neighborhood Center if it truly wants to foster a walkable community. The County should define “walkable” with a check-list of features and measure each new project against this check-list. Projects that fail to meet the “walkable” requirement should not be permitted in a Neighborhood District.

Transit

Until the pedestrian environment is improved, transit will not flourish in this study area. If pedestrian access is improved near the I-85 interchanges at Shallowford, Chamblee-Tucker, Clairmont and North Druid Hills, all of the areas could be better served by circulator busses. These circulators could connect the apartment and office parks near the interchanges with each other and with MARTA rail stations on the Gold northeast line. If a CID is created, it could also explore the possibility of creating a circulator bus system. There is also an opportunity to improve transit connections to downtown and midtown using express busses on HOV lanes.

Code and Ordinance Enforcement

The Shallowford Inn requires consistent policing and code enforcement to eliminate the nuisances arising from this property.

If the County enforced the housing code, many of the apartments units in this area could not be inhabited. Effective enforcement of existing County ordinances is an essential foundation for motivating redevelopment of deteriorating properties and improving the quality of rental housing for the tenants. Proactive local government code enforcement is essential in communities largely inhabited with recent immigrants to the United States. Many immigrants will not contact or are reluctant to contact government authorities. In such circumstances, gangs and illegal activities can flourish. Fair and effective code enforcement can help build trust between the immigrant community and the police department.

Crime is a significant problem, particularly on the northern side of the study area. From May through August of 2010 there were 185 crimes reported to the DeKalb Police. Nearly a third of the crimes (60) were assaults. There were also 19 robberies. In communities with illegal immigrants, crime is generally under-reported. Better enforcement of the housing code would demonstrate that community norms are enforced and expected; and could lead to lower crime rates. (See The Broken Window Theory of James Q. Wilson).

Greenway

The County should encourage the development of a greenway along the western edge of the North Fork of the Peachtree Creek. It may take many years to complete this greenway, but the proposed zoning districts require 20% of the redeveloped area be dedicated to open space. This greenway could connect all of the properties in the southeast quadrant of the Neighborhood Center and possibly the northeast quadrant. As properties are redeveloped in this corridor, the County should begin the process of reserving land for the greenway.

Livable Center Initiative

The Atlanta Regional Commission sponsors the Livable Center Initiative to encourage a better integration of land use and transportation policies. The goals of the program are: reduce sprawl, shorten commutes to work, encourage mixed-use developments and encourage alternative modes of transportation. Funds are available for master planning and for designing and constructing. DeKalb County has never formally applied for a Livable Center Grant for the Shallowford study area, but has had informal discussions about the area with ARC staff. These discussions revealed that ARC is focused upon places with a potential regional impact. A place designated a Neighborhood Center doesn't seem to qualify as having a regional impact.

This study has revealed several important considerations that could sway ARC to support an application for the Shallowford Neighborhood Center. First, there are approximately 20,000 people currently living within the four census block groups closest to the Shallowford interchange. These block groups are mostly within a one mile radius of the interchange. The average density in this area is just over 10 people per acre. In the immediate vicinity of the interchange there are approximately 4,700 multi-family housing units. Most of them are rental units. The City of Decatur has approximately 18,000 residents spread across 4 square miles. Despite a "Neighborhood Center" designation, the Shallowford study area has a larger population than many DeKalb municipalities. Given the current diversity of land uses, the Shallowford area has a good opportunity to redevelop as a mixed-use, walking community.

Alternatively, an LCI application could be predicated upon a chain of interchanges along I-85 in DeKalb. The interchanges at Chamblee Tucker, Shallowford, Clairmont and North Druid Hills share many similar characteristics and collectively they are significant to the region. This corridor includes some of the first office parks built in the region: Executive Park, Century Center, Koger and Presidential. These are major employment centers. There are also high density apartment complexes near each of these interchanges. In recent years both some of these office parks and apartment complexes have been redeveloped. As they reach the end of their economic life, more opportunities for redevelopment will occur. This presents the possibility of creating mixed use centers, a goal of the LCI program. ARC has widened their LCI criteria to include transportation corridors such as this one. A corridor study could further explore the opportunity to create a Community Improvement District linking the office parks.

In either case an LCI study should focus upon improving the pedestrian environment around the interchange(s) and promoting mixed-use walking developments. This goal can be accomplished through master planning, changes to zoning codes and physical improvements to the existing public spaces.

DeKalb County should submit an LCI application to ARC this fall.

Actions for Residents

The proposed zoning code could very likely be the key determinant in the future redevelopment within the Shallowford neighborhood center. Residents must closely monitor and influence the completion of this document, particularly as it applies to the three zoning districts that will apply to neighborhood centers.

A study should be conducted to prioritize missing sidewalks in the community. The neighborhood could organize and conduct this audit and then begin to prioritize construction requests based upon safety and usage. Currently many apartment residents walk without sidewalks along the northbound access road to the commercial businesses along Shallowford and to the MARTA bus stops. This is a significant safety problem, which the County and Georgia DOT should work to resolve. Funding for sidewalk improvements in DeKalb has always been insufficient to meet the demands; never-the-less residents need to start advocating.

Properties along the northbound access road are separated from single-family development by floodplain along the North Branch of the Peachtree Creek. There is a long-term opportunity to create a greenway path along the floodplain that can connect the apartments to the Publix shopping center. Residents interested in this greenway should carefully and cautiously begin to build public support. Only when they are prepared should they approach adjoining property owners. Organizers must find other successful examples of greenways that have created benefits for the adjoining property owners. Single-family owners whose properties touch the creek should be informed and encouraged to control erosion, remove invasive species and to improve stream buffers. Other DeKalb neighborhoods have formed stream corridor advocacy groups. Hopefully neighbors in the study area will volunteer to form such a group and learn from other successful organizations.

The residents and businesses must continue to maintain the landscaping projects along the interchange. As previously noted this is valuable work that can encourage others to participate in community projects and helps distinguish the community. Residents at the community meetings sponsored by TABASCO expressed a desire to create community. It is important for residents to build upon this expression.

Another opportunity for the civic associations is to recommend and encourage homeowners to plant hardwood trees in appropriate places on their properties. Most homeowners tend to plant smaller specimen trees such as Dogwoods, Crepe Myrtles and Japanese Maples. Consequently the metropolitan area is not replacing its tall canopy trees, primarily oaks, when they die. The community has expressed a desire to create a better walking community. By planting oaks and other tall growing trees, neighbors will be helping to create more shade for pedestrians. Tree plantings can also stabilize the creek banks for the North Fork of Peachtree Creek.

The residents should carefully and cautiously explore the opportunities to use the open space under the Georgia Power transmission lines. There are numerous possibilities: a community vegetable or flower garden, a walking and biking trail connecting Dresden Elementary with Dresden Park, a dog run, bird sanctuary or whatever the community can imagine, create and manage. The first step is to find successful examples of creative use of transmission and other rights-of-way that have the support of the adjoining property owners. Finding some alternative use for the space under the transmission lines would certainly be akin to making “lemonade out of lemons” and could improve the property values for affected homes.

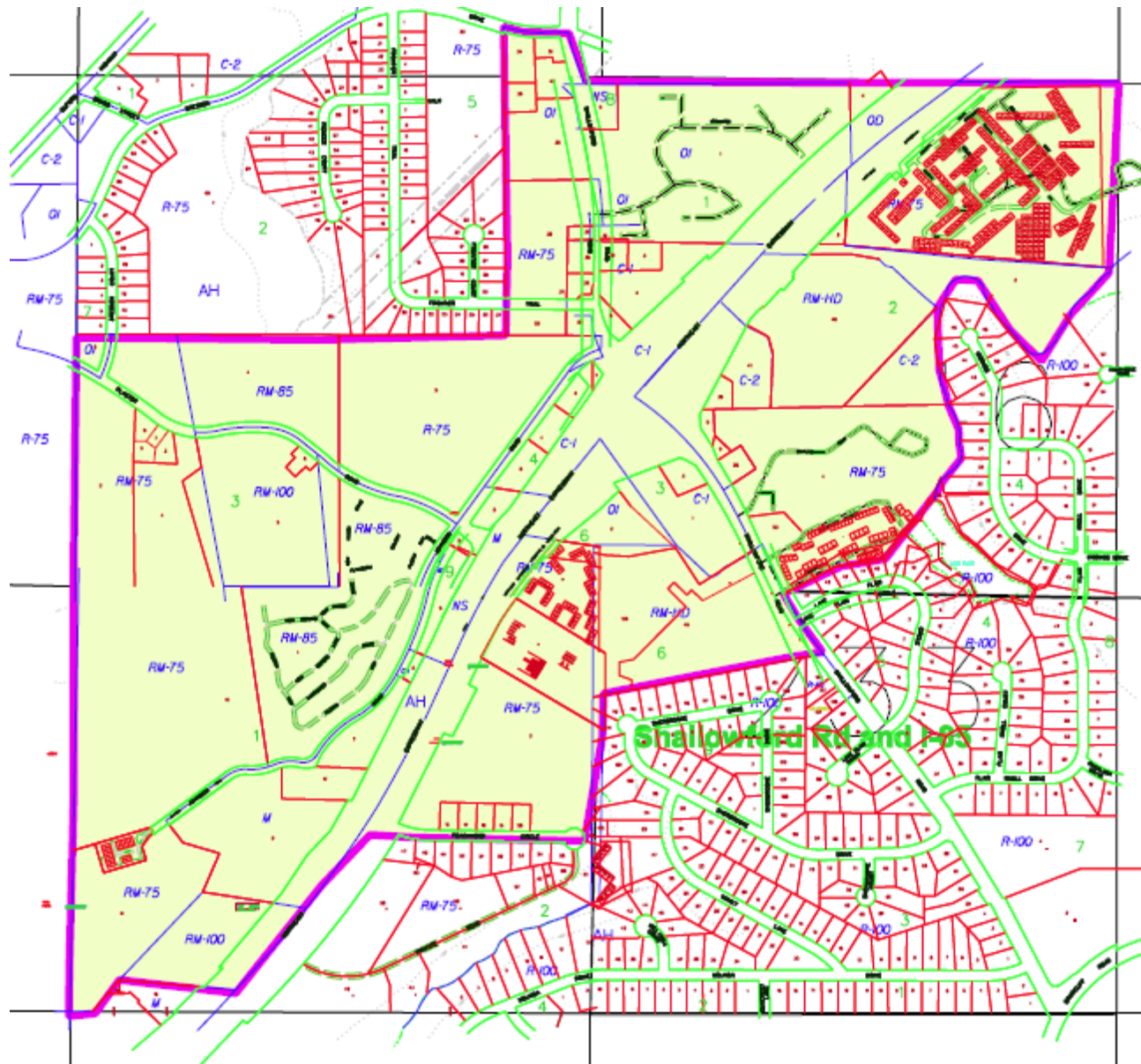
About the Authors

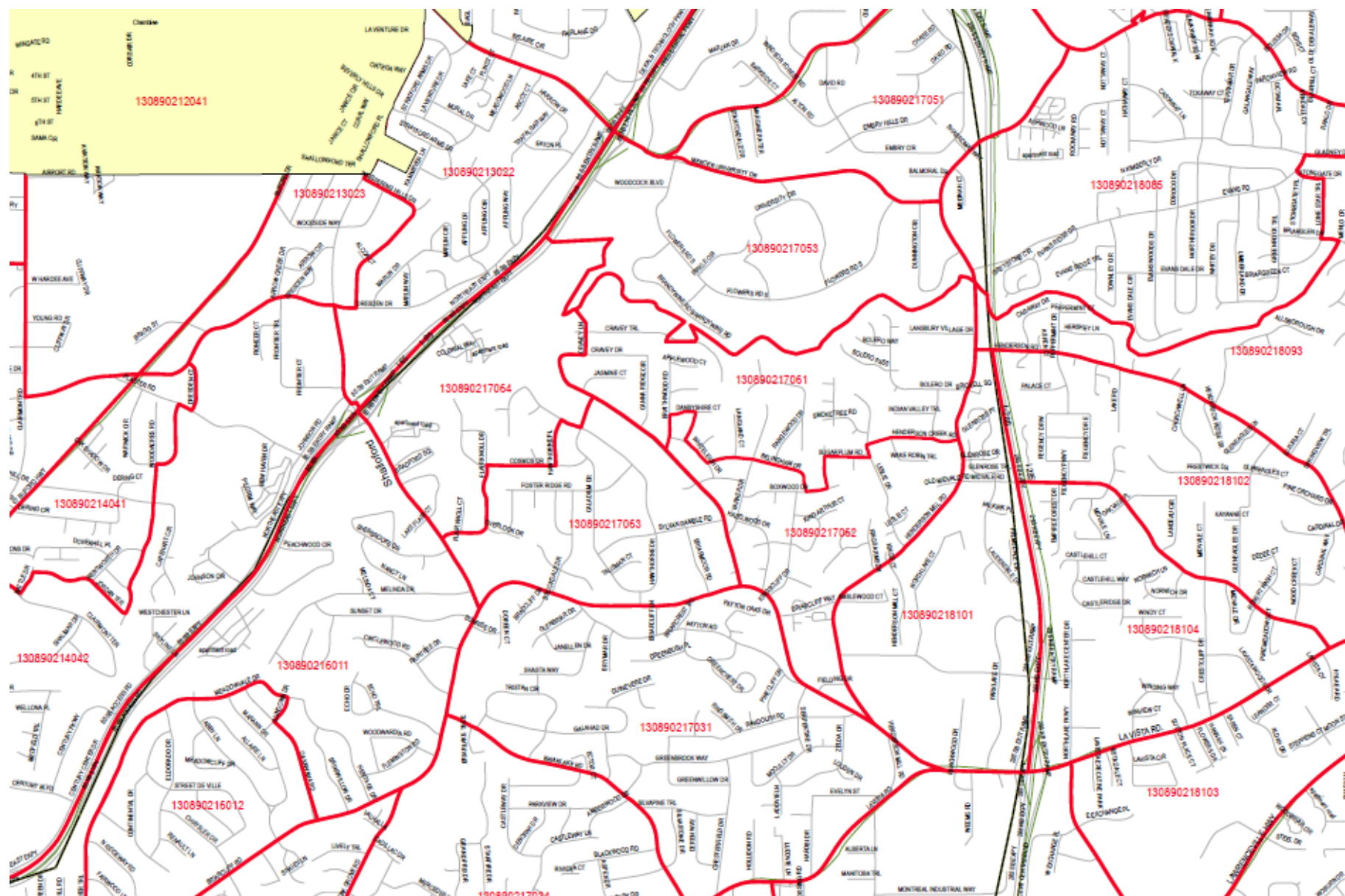
Davis Fox is the principal responsible for this study and report. He attended the Graduate City Planning Program at Georgia Tech. He served on the DeKalb Planning Commission for 8 years. He is a real estate broker specializing in land sales for apartments, condominiums and mixed-use developments in metropolitan Atlanta. He has served on the Atlanta Regional Commission since 2002 and was the Chairman of the Environment and Land Use Committee. He is a founding Board Member and past president of the Alliance to Improve Emory Village, a non-profit organization spearheading the redevelopment of an older commercial district into a mixed-use, walking district.

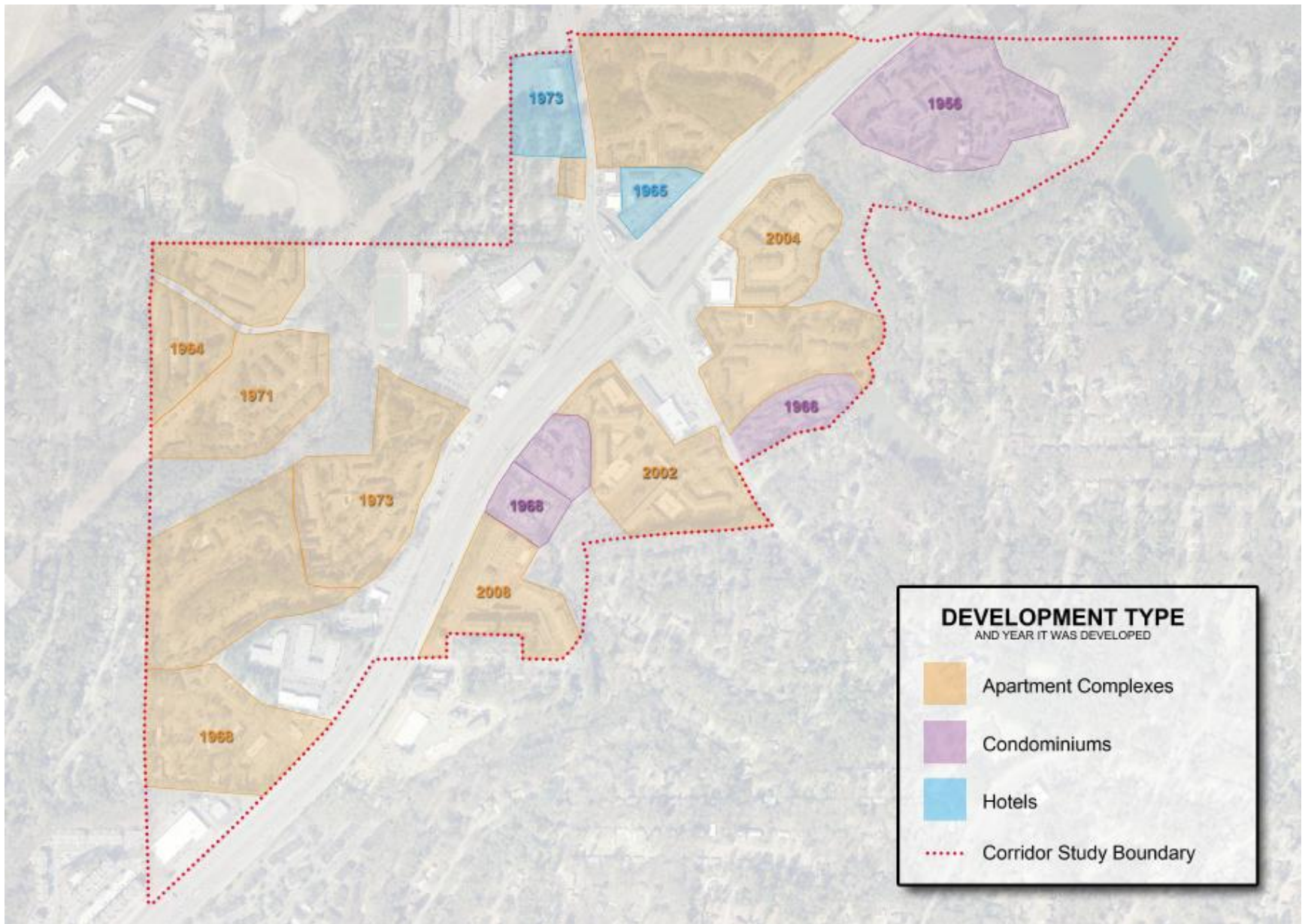
Jessica Toal is an intern architect at ASD, in Atlanta, GA. She has worked and been involved in the architecture and urban design industry for over five years. Jessica received a Bachelor's of Science in Architecture from the University of Michigan in 2005. Following graduation she moved to Atlanta where she worked for three years at Cooper Carry, Inc. In the fall of 2008, while continuing to work at Cooper Carry she began her graduate education. Jessica graduated with a Master's of Architecture from Georgia Institute of Technology in May 2010. In her professional role Jessica has participated in several master planning and urban design projects and her thesis from Georgia Tech was focused on "Retrofitting Suburbia" under the direction of Ellen Dunham-Jones, an award-winning licensed architect and professor.

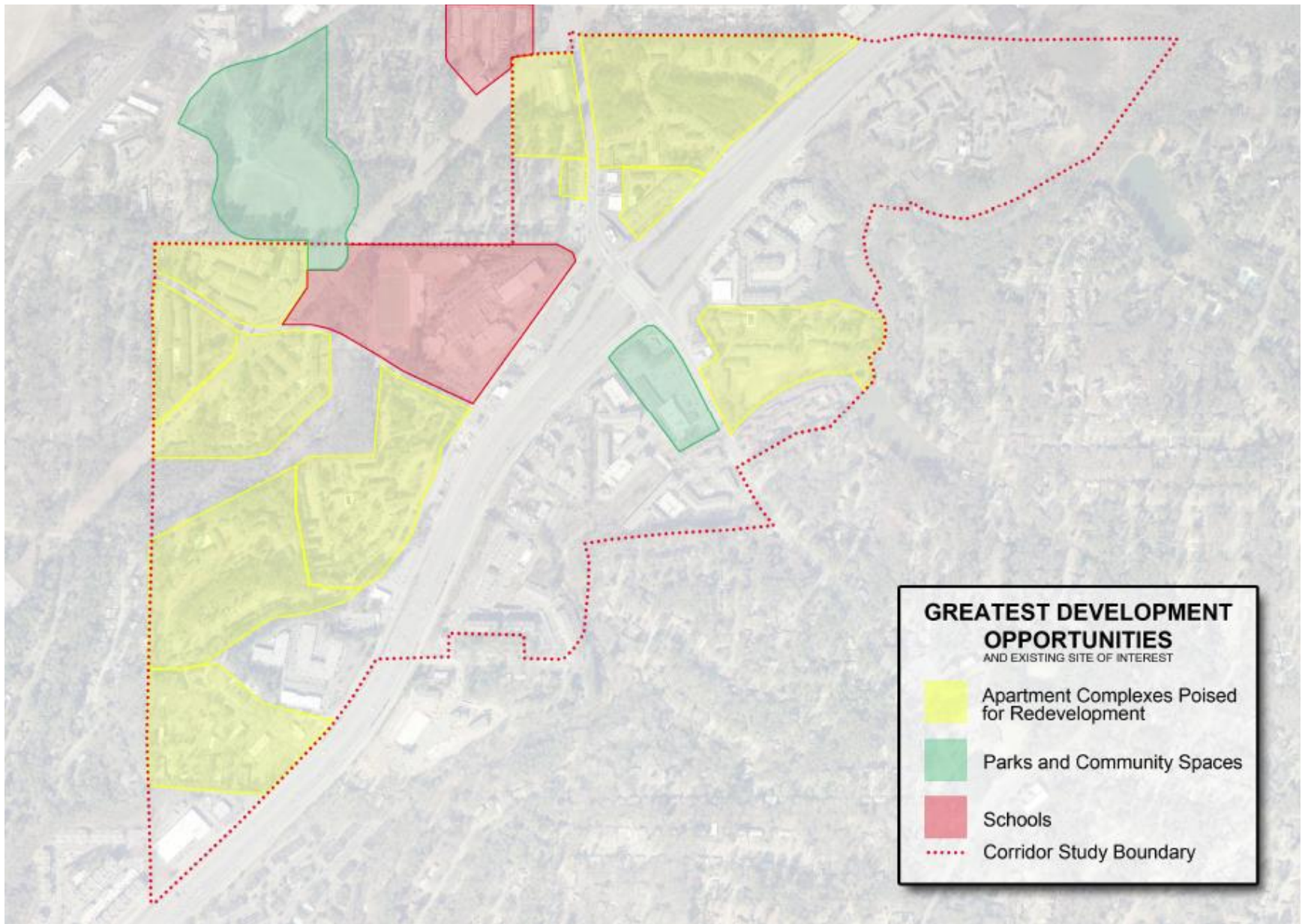
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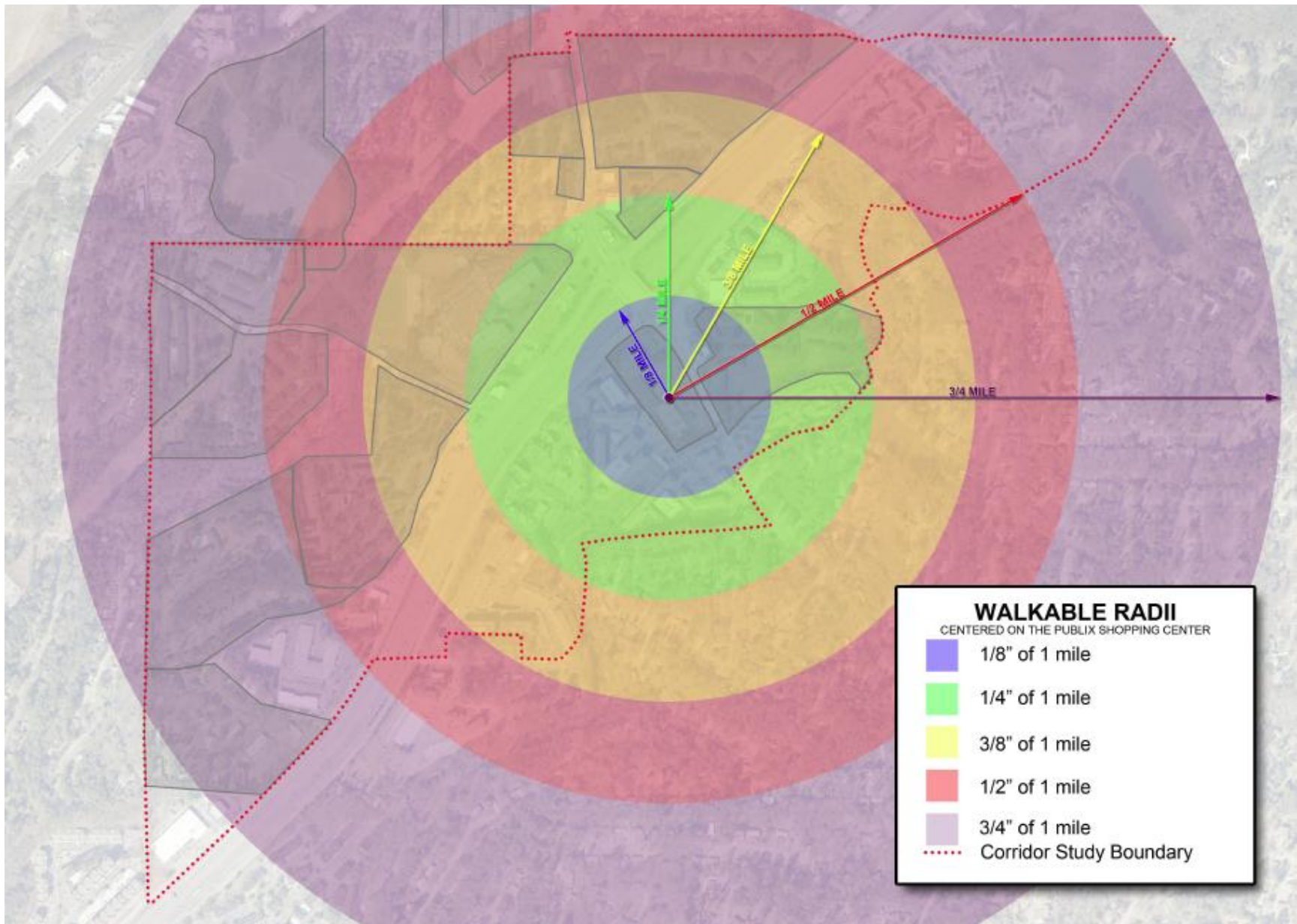
The following were instrumental in completing this study and document. Their participation and leadership are greatly appreciated: Beth Nathan, Ben Seibel, Nikki VanDerGrinten, Betty Phillips, Ursula Lentine, David Buechner, Debbie Schneider, Sydney Douse and the residents who attended and participated in the TABASCO community meeting during the summer of 2010.

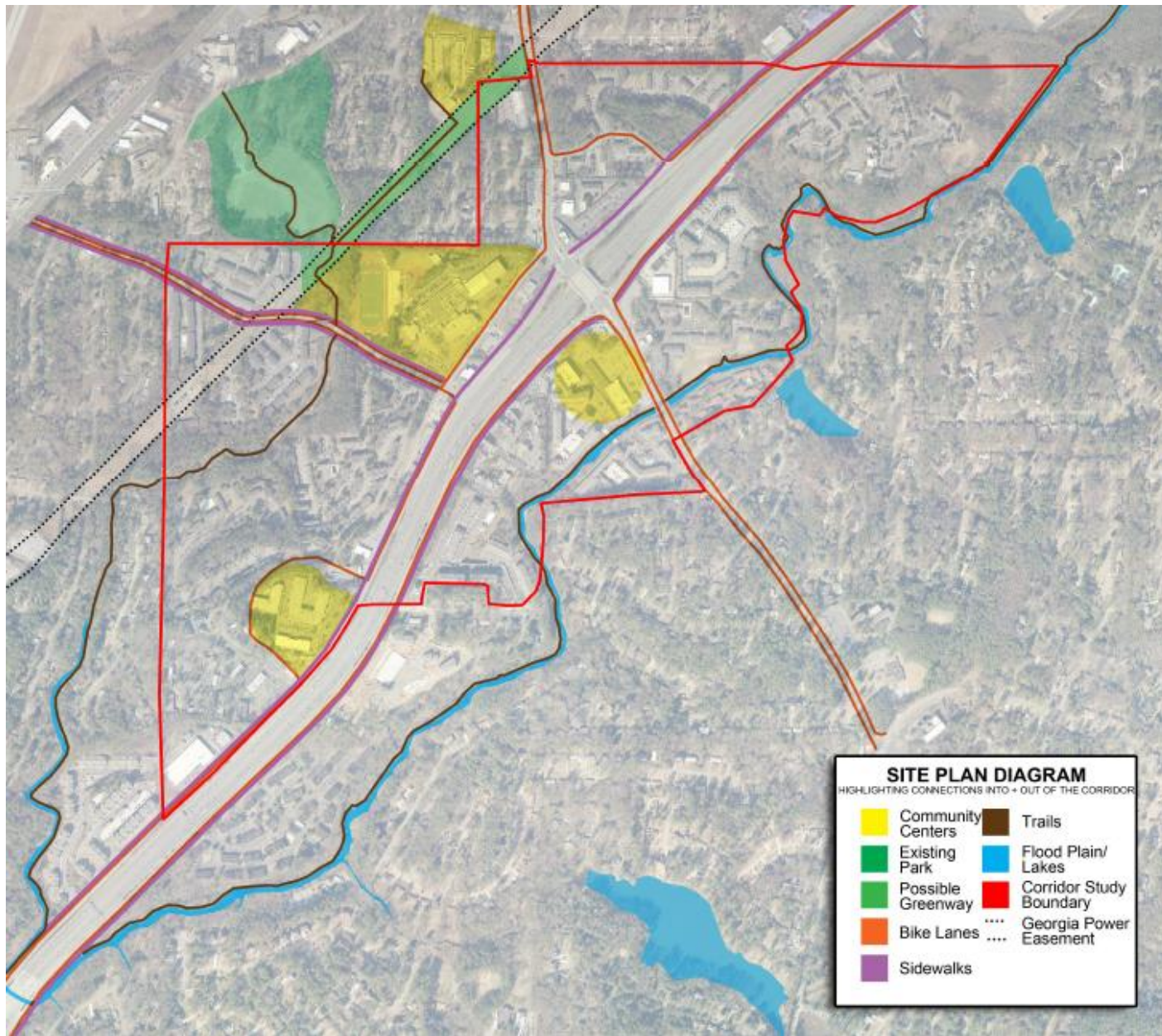


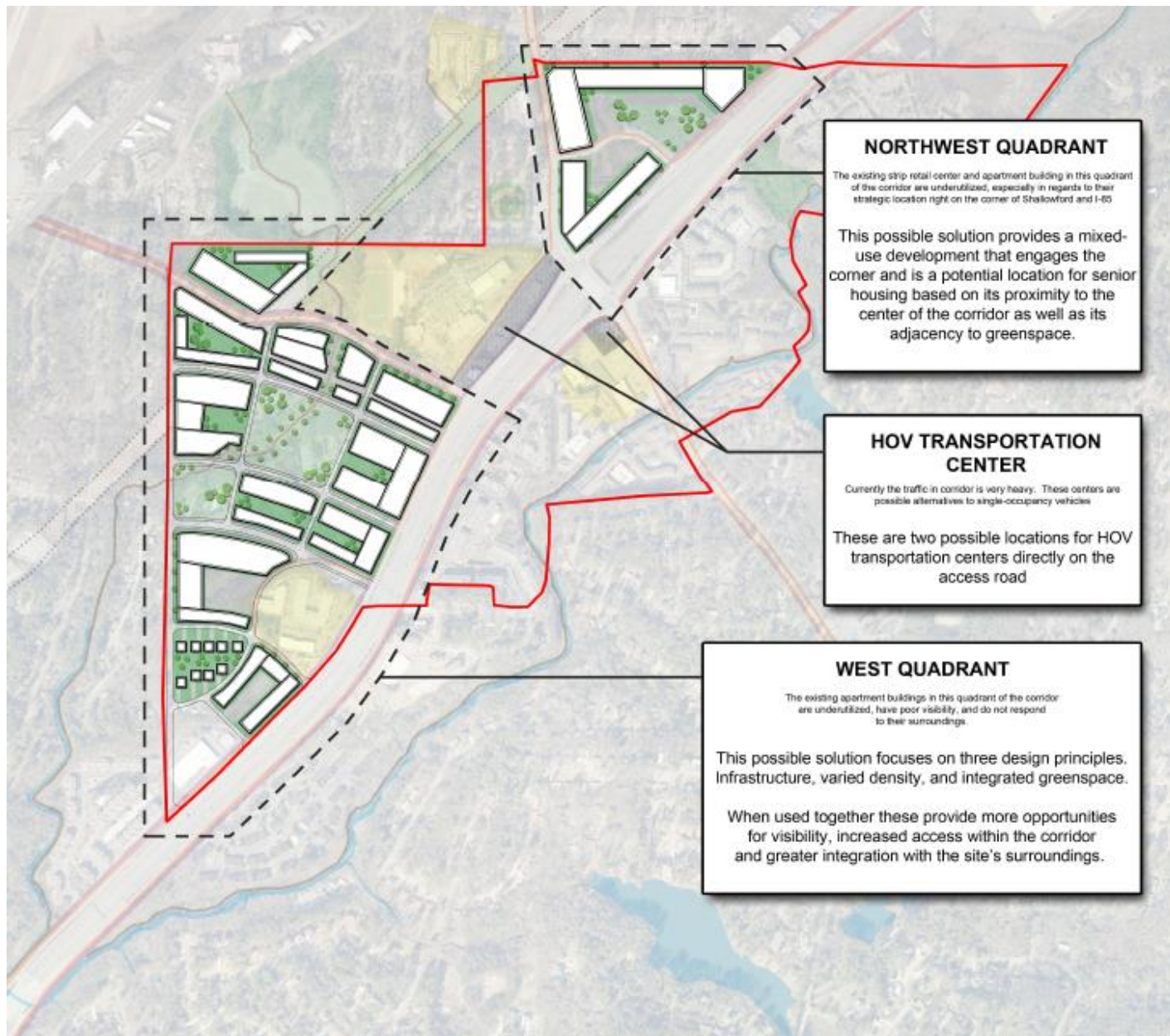














EXISTING PLASTER ROAD

sidewalks do not currently exist on both sides of the street
existing width of ROW promotes higher traffic speeds



PROPOSED PLASTER ROAD

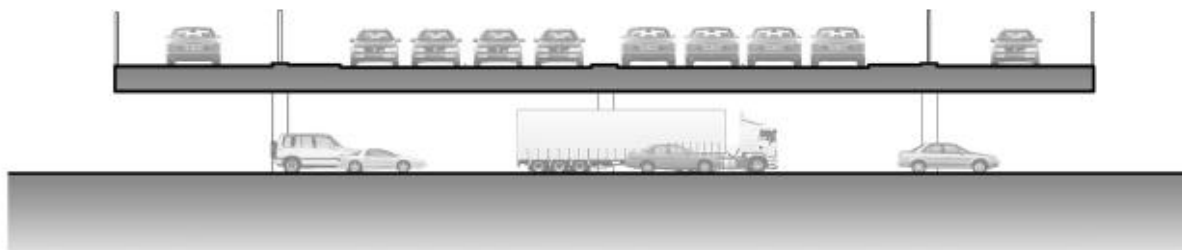
sidewalks on both sides of the street
two lanes of traffic with bike lanes within existing ROW
tree lined streets provide a safe buffer between pedestrians and traffic





EXISTING SHALLOWFORD ROAD (HWY OVERPASS 8 LANES)

sidewalks are directly off the street and separated from the access road turn arounds by only a fence
a median exists, yet is currently only a concrete curb



PROPOSED SHALLOWFORD ROAD (HWY OVERPASS 8 LANES)

eight lanes of traffic separated by a planted median
in place of the metal fence separating the access road turn around, provide a metal lattice structure supporting vines that further separate additional lanes of traffic and add to the overall pedestrian experience

